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Synopsis

Nineteenth Century adopted the optimistic and progressive attitude that was implicit throughout the enlightenment and changed it into reality during the Industrial Revolution. Aimed at development, the Industrial Revolution brought about the greatest change that transformed the social, political, economic and environmental condition of England. During nineteenth century, England not only saw success of the industrial revolution, progress in science but also because of the rise and spread of British Imperial power. With the progress, great leap in technology there was an overall decline in the socio-economic and cultural domain of the English lives. Due to Industrial Revolution people moved from rural regions to newly developing cities in search of work but were left in bad living conditions. This gave rise to a new class of working people. It ensured that more and more people were tortured and exploited. There was rise in child labour and women workers; along with the working class men, they were also exploited. Along with the exploitation of human resources, the environment also went through drastic changes. The process of Industrial Revolution wrecked havoc on it. There was depletion of natural resources, pollution; unhealthy conditions were on rise. The socio-political situation was not better. In early nineteenth century England, Only a small minority of men could vote and no woman was given the privilege. The situation was worse for them. Women began to be exploited in both private and public spheres. The women working outside had to face several adverse situations. On the other hand, the middle class with the new wealth became the harbinger of morals, developed new work ethics etc. There was demarcation of women's position, were given certain roles and were stamped as weak.

I intend to study the novels of Jane Austen (1775-1815), Mary Shelley (1797-1851), Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865), Charlotte Bronte (1816-1855), Emily Bronte (1818-48), and George Eliot (1819-1880) to trace the ecological change and understand how they reacted to the contemporary conditions in England. Along with this, I would also study the relationship between nature, women and the perception of nature as depicted in the novels. It is to be noted that not all the works by these novelist explicitly deal with these issues, so the works that I have chosen by Jane Austen are *Sense and Sensibility (1811), Pride and Prejudice(1813), Mansfield Park(1814), Emma(1816) and Northanger Abbey(1818).* Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein or the ModernPrometheus (1818), The Last Man (1826). Mary Barton (1848), Cranford (1857), Ruth (1853), North andSouth* (1855) by Elizabeth Gaskell. *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography (1847), Shirley (1849)* by Charlotte Bronte, *Wuthering Heights (1847)* by Emily Bronte. *Adam Bede (1859), Silas Marner (1861), Middlemarch (1871-72)* by George Eliot.

While Jane Austen and Mary Shelley belonged to the early nineteenth century, the period often called the Romantic Period, others like Elizabeth Gaskell, the Bronte Sisters and George Eliot belonged to the mid- nineteenth century, called the Victorian Period. If we pay attention to the chronological order of these authors and their works then we notice that there is almost a gap of thirty years. Therefore, there must have been difference in their representation of their immediate conditions as England had gone through several major changes in every aspect within those years. So, I would like to study this change specially in relation to women's, common man's condition and ecological crisis that was getting created.

Generally, we get to see in studies relating to nature look at Jane Austen works as that is painted with images of an agrarian countryside. That Mary Shelley's nature presents ice capped mountains, oceans as continuous companion of human beings. ElizabethGaskell in her novels combines an understanding of the situation of the poor working class with an amazing power of description and empathy. The Bronte Sisters' use of natural landscapes serves as moral and spiritual touchstone for characters. George Eliot's novels apart from presenting problems of the society also provide descriptions of midland landscape.

The dominance over environment, ecology and the so-called weaker section of the society had already started from the end of the eighteenth century due to the drastic changes that were going on both on local and global scale. Through a critical study of the social, political background of the age, we can examine the multiple layers of exploitations and domination. Ecocriticism is a study of relationship between literature and nature which developed in the later part of the twentieth century. A part of this is Ecofeminism, which studies the relation between nature and women. Both are considered by the ecofeminists to be oppressed and exploited in the society and culture constructed by patriarchy.

Ecofeminism emerged in the 1970s with the increasing consciousness of the connection between women and nature. French writer Francoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 used the term "Ecofeminism". She saw pollution, destruction of environment, and explosive population growth as problems created by a male culture. A central tenet in Ecofeminism states that male ownership of land has led to a dominant culture (patriarchy), manifesting itself in over-grazing, the tragedy of the commons, exploitation of people, and an abusive land ethic in which animals and land are valued only as economic resources. Ecofeminism specifically opposes all form of dominance, hierarchy be it men over women, heterosexual over homosexual and also humans over animals or non-humans. Carolyn Merchant thinks that Ecofeminism should avoid gendering nature as a nurturing mother or a goddess and rejected anthropocentrism. She also quotes philosopher Karen Warren on ecofeminist ethic to be "A critique of male domination of both women and nature and an attempt to frame an ethic free of male-gender bias about women and nature" (195). Thus, we can see that, Ecofeminism is a reaction against sexism, racism, class exploitation and environmental destruction which it believes to be the four most important pillars of the patriarchal society and culture and there is an emphasis on finding own power from within rather than needing to impose the manipulations and control of power over on the suppressed beings.

In " 'A blot upon the earth': Nature's "Negative" and the Production of Monstrosity in *Frankenstein"* , Helena Feder examines the monstrosity and acculturation in the context of Western culture's objectification of nonhuman nature. In " 'For you, pollution', The Victorian novel and a human ecology: Disraeli's *Sibyl* and Gaskell's *Mary Barton*",John Parham examines the texts from the perspective of Human Ecocriticism, which he borrowed from Catherine

Gallagher. Gallagher defines it as "It is an ecological theory that would substitute the romantic, deep ecology with a more dialectical understanding in which the now recognized complexity of ecological systems would extend to encompass the human realm including, ultimately issues around environmental injustice" (1). *A Garden Party for Spinsters, Queers, and Whores: Gender Performance and Nature Imagery in the novels of George Eliot and Virginia Woolf,* is a dissertationby Sara Elizabeth Jordans. She studies how the female characters escape the gender constraints (though temporarily) through their relation with the nature. These are some of the existing works. It is my observation that apart from these, there is no attempt to engage in a sustained manner, with the subject by approaching the works of the major women novelists of the nineteenth century from an ecofeminist approach.

I intend to use Ecofeminism as a tool to explore the possibilities latent in the writings of the major women novelists of nineteenth century England in terms of emerging problems concerning nature, environment, and ecology. Through examining their novels, I also wish to explore the idea that those people (irrespective of gender) who possess a better sensibility, are sensitive and are endowed with a caring nature, have a greater concern about the environment and the natural world. Such people realize that we must protect and preserve the nature rather than destroying it.

In the project, I would in the first chapter deal with what Ecofeminism is, its significances and how it is to be applied to the individual authors. Then, I would dedicate each chapter to an author and deal with them individually by showing the changes in the landscapes, their concern about their immediate conditions of England as reflected in their works.

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